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Task Force On Culture and Historic Heritage Policy Statement

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FEDERATION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES
POLICY STATEMENT

ON

CULTURE AND HISTORIC HERITAGE

THE ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES IN CULTURE AND HERITAGE

The Municipal role in culture and heritage is an interweaving of responsibility and opportunity. It is responsibility in that, as an important link in the Canadian complex of government, municipalities are situated to play an important part in the preservation and development of Canadian culture. It has rewards in that a sound policy of cultural support can bring a municipality not only social advantages, but direct and indirect economic benefits.

The strength of Canada's culture rests on diversity: respect for differences based on geography, economic and social environment and ethnic background. It is based especially on regional differences which municipalities by their nature can understand and reflect more sensitively than other orders of government which have a much wider geographical base. While other governments may have more flexibility in resources to give umbrella support to culture and conservation, the municipality can often give encouragement and help with little or no financial outlay. For example, the vital start of a performing arts group may be fostered by imaginative means, such as the provision of municipal space or an arts loan fund, before it has acquired the reputation which justifies application for backing from any other order of government. The decision to preserve

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the architectural heritage of a downtown is best made municipally where the costs and benefits are most strongly felt and understood.

If the municipality is the partner it claims or wishes to be in the governing of Canada, it cannot disregard the part it can best play in Canadian culture and heritage.

The Municipality has a responsibility to support culture and heritage conservation because in the Canadian lifestyle they have become expected amenities. Such support may take the form of technical assistance, space allotment, counselling and general fostering of a climate for cultural growth. Fifty years ago it was not assumed that the municipality would provide local arenas or pools, but in most cities they have come to be considered essential. Now, facilities for the performing and visual arts, as well as active policies for conserving the community's heritage, are increasingly in vocal demand. Now Canadians are spending more entertainment dollars for culture than for sport. Municipal leaders respond to the evolving interest of the electorate.

Some municipalities have been fortunate enough to have cultural or heritage assets of national importance. No one would question the economic returns through job creation, spin-off industries and, of course, tourism. But it does not take a Stratford or a Quebec City to yield rewards: they are simply extreme examples where heavy investments have yielded large returns. Perhaps less dramatically and less visibly, other places have found that any investment in culture brings commensurate dividends.

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Tourism is the most evident economic reward. It does not require a theatre of international renown or a famous historic site to bring tourist dollars. The thriving local theatre or gallery, the annual folk or historic festival can be a bigger factor in bringing tourist dollars from the region than the newest industrial plant or shopping centre which so often is featured in municipal promotion. Tourist literature should not lag far behind changing tastes, especially in relation to culture and conservation.

Tourism does not necessarily imply a family crossing a country or a province with the fixed destination of a certain municipality. It may mean the family's afternoon discussion on whether to stay here or to go to the next place for the night. In places of comparable size, one shopping centre or motel may look like the next; hence it is the cultural amenities which are likely to determine the decision and add a few more tourist dollars. There may not be a museum, a gallery or a theatre to visit, but if a town has restored its main street or an interesting Victorial residential neighbourhood, it has created a tourist attraction because that town is now more interesting, stimulating, photographable, and certainly different.

"Cultural industries" is a relatively new term and culture is a new growth industry. The term recognizes that culture is an industry worth $7 billion dollars a year, if one includes book and magazine publishing and television as part of that industry. A municipality is more likely to get a fair share of that action by building on its own resources rather than by the conventional route of attracting industry from outside. Department of Communications' statistics show that it is one of Canada's most labour-intensive industries,

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one that is most immune to future employment dislocation through computerization or robotics. It usually spreads its benefits widely to other service industries.

Heritage conservation has probably the most identifiable and substantial economic and social pay-offs. The recycling of old buildings for modern commercial, professional, industrial and residential use rarely places hidden charges on municipalities as new high-rise construction sometimes does. Like new development it creates new tax revenue. It solves, rather than creates, problems of downtown blight.

Being more labour intensive than modern construction, it adds employment. But the final dividend, although intangible, is by far the greatest: visual assets which contribute to the quality of life in the community and also encourage dollar-spending visitors. The Canadian examples are legion: Gastown in Vancouver, the warehouse district in Winnipeg, Front Street East in Toronto, the market area of Ottawa, the City of Quebec's Fort Royale, the Halifax waterfront and a host of conservation projects in smaller cities and towns such as the Main Street of Unionville, Ontario.

A municipality does not need an historic site or very old buildings to reap the rewards of heritage conservation. San Francisco, one of the most successful U.S. cities in building its tourist attraction on heritage conservation, has almost no architecture earlier than the 1906 earthquake. In community after community, conservation based on imagination and quality rather than age has changed areas from blight to community profit.

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Besides creating employment in their redevelopment, such heritage conservation projects support a continuing retail trade whose value to tourism is usually underestimated: Antiques, Liquor, food and restrooms are everywhere, but municipalities which also have antique dealers or markets draw tourists like moths to the flame.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of municipalities in culture and conservation is in urgent need of review. The responsibilities have become apparent as municipalities assert their place in the Canadian partnership. The economic rewards are constantly increasing.

Municipalities must recognize and respond to changing public taste which give a growing priority to cultural and conservation activities.

It is recommended by the Task Force on Culture and Historic Heritage that the F.C.M.:

1. collect, compile and distribute to its members information on the opportunities to promote culture and heritage conservation in Canadian communities;

2. encourage the federal and provincial governments to expand their incentives and safeguards for the preservation and renovation of heritage buildings;

3. encourage the federal and provincial governments to take advantage of the role that municipalities can play in partnership with those governments in administering programmes and projects aimed at assessing

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the impact of initiatives and promoting culture and heritage conservation at the local level;

4. foster continuing exchanges with major cultural and heritage organizations to utilize their resources to help define and develop an effective municipal role in the areas of culture and heritage;

5. encourage all Canadian municipalities to recognize the need for sustained funding for some cultural industries (i.e. symphonies, community theatres); and

6. make known to its members a variety of creative methods for financing cultural industries.